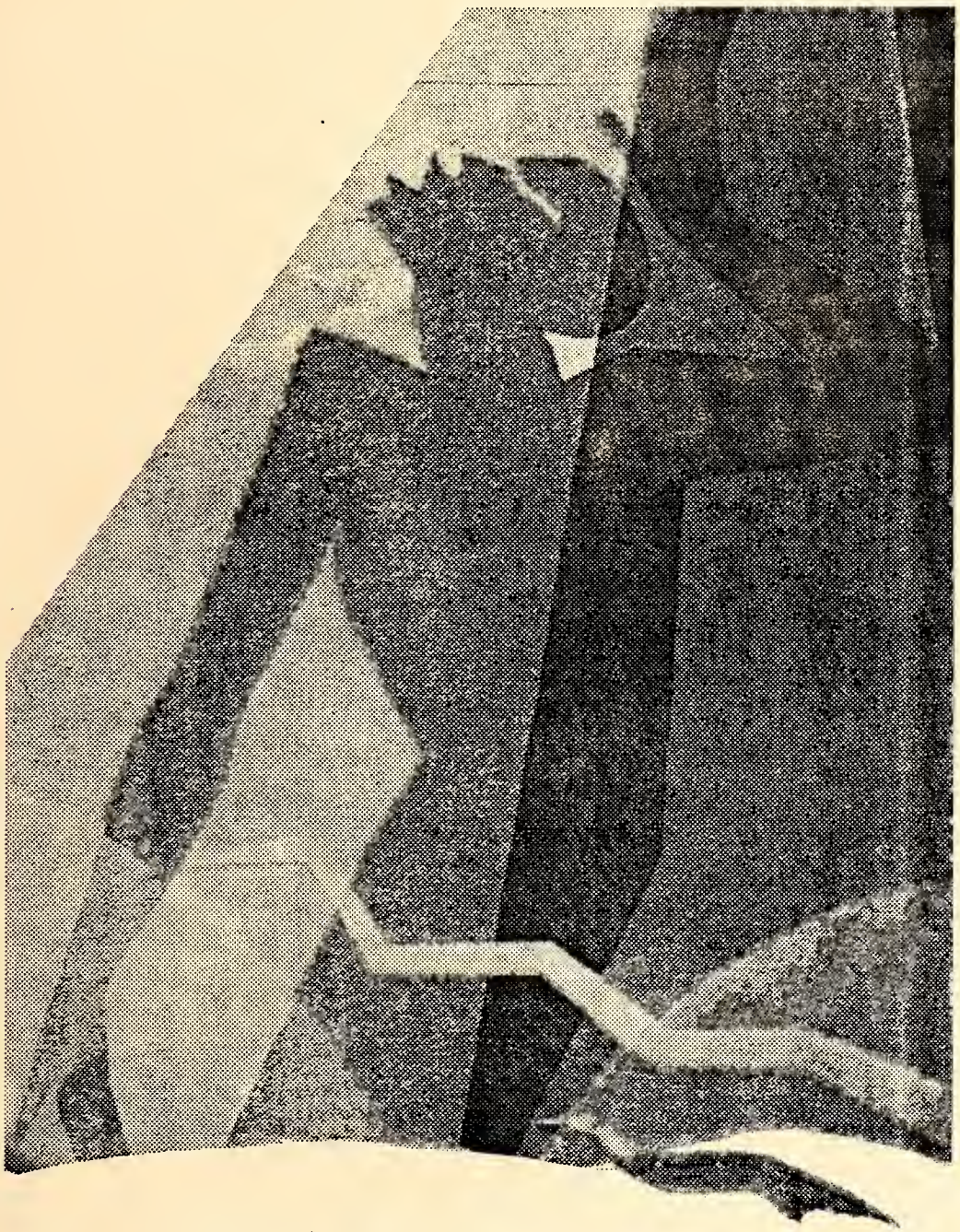
Words of Power



A Book of Poems and Prose
by ***Recycle and Read Students***

General Services Division, Duke University Medical Center

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(Cover art by Aaron Douglas from **God's Trombones** by James Weldon Johnson written in 1927)

Words of Power

A Book of Poems and Prose

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Poems and prose were written as part of
WORDS of POWER
a workshop conducted by
Cedar Koons, Poet in Residence,
Cultural Services Program, Duke University Medical Center

The workshop was a collaboration between
the Recycle and Read Program
of the General Services Division, Duke University Medical Center,
Cultural Services Program, Duke University Medical Center
with support from the North Carolina Humanities Council
and Durham Technical Community College

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Preface

These poems and prose pieces were written by participants in the RECYCLE AND READ PROGRAM. This workplace literacy program began a year and a half ago to teach hospital service workers basic reading, writing and math skills.

During the past few months, the program has been fortunate to have Cedar Koons, the Duke University Medical Center's poet in residence, lead workshops for students in each of our four classes. Her eight-week program, ***WORDS OF POWER,*** concentrated on reading poems by Black American poets. Students learned about poetic form and themes. They wrote their own poems, short stories and prose pieces. Students who wished to, selected one piece to include in this book.

This project was a collaboration between the Recycle and Read Program, the Cultural Services Program of the Medical Center with support from the North Carolina Humanities Council and Durham Technical Community College. Judging by the enthusiasm of the students and the quality of the writing produced, we hope this will be the first of many joint projects.

MY GRANDMOMA'S VEGETABLE GARDEN

I remember hoeing weeds from the garden
with the smell of fresh vegetables in the air
I did not appreciate the colorful vegetables,
that played a big part in my childhood growth.

My grandmoma would wipe the sweat from my brow
and say, "Come on my child"
we are nearly finished now.
That special caring touch from my grandmoma
would make my task worthwhile.

Angie Brunson
Dietary Services

THE BUZZARD TOOK THE MONKEY FOR A RIDE

The buzzard took the monkey for a ride in the air.
The monkey thought that everything was right and square.
The buzzard tried to throw the monkey off his back.
But the monkey grabbed his neck and said "Whoa Jack."
The buzzard howled, "Monkey you're squeezing me! Release my neck and I'll set you free!"
The monkey looked the buzzard right dead in the eye
Said your story is touching
But it sounds like a lie.

Christina McPherson
Environmental Services

GOD IS ABOVE

As I look around and see the beautiful trees, I can feel the wind and its breeze.
As I look up into the sky I know that God is up there on high.
He looks down upon us everyday and helps us on our way.

As I look up into the sky I know that God is up there on high.
He's watching us everyday, He's forever leading the way.

Mattie Harris
Environmental Services

When I was a child I can remember my mom preparing our Sunday morning breakfast. We would wake up to the smell of frying chicken and coffee brewing on the stove. The old house would be warm and comfortable. Mom with her hair rolled up and her quilted robe on and her made up face. Standing at the stove turning the chicken over. Singing her church song, "Go Tell It On The Mountain." Her voice sounded so sweet and clear.

Joyce Anderson

Dietary Services

YOUNG BLACK BOYS

In America today most young black boys do not have a male role model to look up to. Here we find that about 60% of our young men are locked behind walls, or out selling drugs. Our black men need to take more time teaching and showing our young boys that it's more to life than just selling drugs or going to jail.

Dorothy Hunt

Environmental Services

LOVING YOU

How can you stand there and tell me it's over.
Loving you has been a joyous thing.
Loving you through the winter and spring.
What else can I hope for and what else can it bring.

I've loved you in every way, what more can I say.
Let's just keep on Loving one another.
Then we won't have to look any further.

Ida Alston
Environmental Services

My brother and I went to the country to spend the summer with my grandparents when school was out. My brother and I were playing hop scotch in the yard one evening. I told my brother I'm tired of playing the game. Let's go and get us a watermelon out of grandad's garden. My grandad sold watermelon to people in the community. My grandad always thumped the watermelon to make sure it was right to pick to sell. My brother and I went barefooted in the grassy garden looking for the right melon. We didn't have a knife to cut the melon. My brother got a stick and we thumped and cracked open ten melons. The melon smelled like honeysuckle. My brother and I sat in the garden and ate, our stomachs full until my grandma missed us and came looking for us. She found us all washed in watermelon juice sitting in the garden. That was my last day I went in my grandad's garden messing around in his melon patch.

Velma Bass

Dietary Services

THE GARDEN

It is a hard job to keep it
green and clean
You plant the seed
and you wait
and wait
until it comes up
And you cultivate it
then you pick it
and you eat it
freeze it or can it
I give some away
and sell some too
The hardest vegetable to grow
is okra
The easiest to grow
is green beans

Donnie Hawley
Dietary Services

MEMORIES

She was always loving and kind
and the things she did for
you she didn't mind.
Her hair was a fiery auburn
red and when the sun shined on it
it would glow just like
a ruby's bed.
Children all around would come
by just to hear her tales and stories
of long ago and eat cookies
she would bake for them while
they listened in silence.
But as time went on she grew
old and lost her memory
now she just sits and drifts back and forward
as the children she used to tell stories to pass her by.
But she is still as loving and caring
as the first time I met her
This loving lady is my aunt Emma Lou.

Annie Taborn
Dietary Services

MEMORIES OF 1964

I remember back in '64 on a bright and
sunny Sunday afternoon after church, my parents
aunt and uncle decided to take
pictures of us kids.
I was only nine years old then, but I remember being excited and very anxious.
The dress I wore was my favorite dress.
Striped with pleats and a big bow in the
back. My hair had ribbons and bows to match.
My siblings were younger and not excited at all. They wanted to run and play. My older brother even cried. He wanted food. (always hungry)
As I look at the picture today, 27 years
later, I see how happy and well taken care of
we were. Five children all looking very secure and content. We were blessed.

Darlene Parrish
Environmental Services

GRANDMOTHER

A hard working woman with a whole lot of pride.
Her education she couldn't hide
Always speak when spoken to
She knew exactly what to do.

She was short and stout and she always like to wander about
A walk in the woods and name the trees.
Then she would tell us about the leaves.

A church going lady with a lot of soul
She would give each of us something of hers to hold.
She would laugh, she would cry
She would smile and she would sigh.

She's passed away, now she's gone
But she left her memories for us to carry on.
We love you grandmother and always will
Because she had so much love to give.

Sally Smith
Environmental Services

LIVING IN THE COUNTRY

In a home there are many things to do
I built my bathroom and so can you
I changed my old windows to new
storm windows
I covered my old sheet rock wall
with paneling
I removed my old rugs and put
tile on my floor
Sometimes I find time to fish

Dorothy Lunsford
Environmental Services

ABOUT THE ROBIN

I first saw him from my window
Sitting out in the apple tree
His plumage so bright with colors
Singing his song of spring.
I opened my window so gentle
and tossed him some bits of food
Until he became quite friendly
Each day, for weeks he returned
Filling my days with brightness
With his presence and cheery song
Until one day I missed him
I waited but all in vain
Into the yard in search I ventured
Looking in the trees and in the lawn
Alas! I found robin
Lying dead upon the lawn
As I knelt down beside him
my eyes filled with tears
and I knew without looking
Robin had been
The victim of a B-B gun.

Jessie Calloway
Environmental Services

CAME AND WENT

When she was young and filled with grace
firm backbone and fair faced
She walked down the street
with her head held high
She knew who she was
She caught everyone's eye.
People knew her name
though often they knew her not.
She never had to work
for anything she got.
Now she is old and wheelchair bound.
No longer bold
No longer sound
She just sits there
Watching passers-by,
No one hardly stops to say hi.
Known to most is her name
But no one mentions her just the same
Her young days were good and well spent.
But just like her fame
they came and went.

Delores Hodges
Environmental Services

LISTEN

My grandson listen to me
The wooden slave ship came to the African shore
They bought us to a new land
Home, we never see anymore

Chained and bound under the gun
No place to hide and no where to run
We worked from sun-up to sundown
Grandson, listen to me

Then Abe said, "You are free."
Free to be what you want to be
The people in the South rebelled
Turning the country into a fiery hell

Grandson, listen to me
Kennedy, King and Malcolm X came
They did not play the waiting game
We marched, prayed and sang
Then things began to change

So, grandson, keep the dream alive
Not only from nine to five
When you succeed in your climb
Do not leave your brother and sister behind.

Eckerd Kenion
Environmental Services

The trees are blossoming
The flowers are coming up
The kids are playing in the yard
The bus is coming up the street
The door is opening,
here comes my mother
she looks very tired
her movements look like
she's in slow motion.
I run to give my mother some help.
I ask her how was her day
"Good," she replies
It is o.k. baby.
Once we go to the house
She would put down her purse,
wash up and
go to the kitchen to prepare dinner
for my sisters and brother
I would tell my mother
I'll clean up you go rest.
She says, thank you baby.
She goes to sit down
In the rocking chair
and she fell to sleep.

Gwen Cash
Dietary Services

CEDAR LIKE A TREE

You have power and emotion in
every word you say.
You have been a poet for
many a day
Your words so eloquently spoken,
rhyme and will keep your
attention all the time
A big cedar tree with outstretched arms
(not meaning any harm)
A firm stand and
strong foundation
Spreading joy throughout the nation
Thank you, Cedar, for coming our way
Maybe we'll meet another day
Many writers have a famous name
But in our hearts, you have made it
To the Poetry Hall of Fame.

Recycle and Read Students
Environmental Services
Duke University Medical Center
June, 1991

MOUNTAINS

The drive to the mountains
my eyes began to get so
heavy they felt like lead
I couldn't keep them opened
So I slept instead
When I began to wake up and
looked out the car window
I saw tall mountains far, far away.
Some of the mountains had snow on them
Like a white Polar Bear.
The trees looked like a
rainbow on a sunny day
after it had rain.
The houses sitting
in between the rocks
looked like
ant hills.

Gloria Robinson
Dietary Services

EASTER MORNING WITH MAMA

It's Easter Sunday morning.
The sweet smell of bacon fills the house.
Mama's in the kitchen singing along
as the radio is playing.
Tears begin to flow as I listen
to the song "Were you There When They Crucified
My Lord" was playing.
Mama sees me crying and gives
me a tender kiss that only a mother
could give.
She dries my flowing tears while
explaining the true meaning of Easter.
I was feeling better when mama said
"Yes, they crucified my Lord, son."
I'll never forget the way mama's
face brightened up as she said
"Thank God early one Sunday morning
He rose."

Jimmy Wilson
Laundry Services

TIME LINE

Children are not like they used to be,
There was a time when people could sit
outside at night and enjoy watching a
beautiful moon or starry sky.
You could even hear the neighbors sometimes
two or three houses from you singing, laughing,
and talking to one another.
Some would have Bible study until late evening.
That's the time people loved and cared about one
another.
Now on a starry night someone is being robbed or killed
and instead of neighbors singing, someone's screaming
in the night for help.
You go on the porch at night for a breath of fresh
air and the only air you get is the smell of reefer.

Patricia Steele
Environmental Services

WIND

Wind Wind that blows tree so high
Come blow my kite so that I may fly
Wind that blows in the night
It's such a beautiful sight

Gwendolyn Andrews
Environmental Services

MEMORABLE MOMENTS

One of my most memorable moments that I can remember is my mother making homemade oatmeal cookies. We used to gather around the table just to watch her make them. And the house smelled of those cookies baking in the oven. On one particular afternoon the cookies were finished baking and they were cooling on top of the stove. Me, being the oldest, convinced my two brothers at that time that we could eat all those cookies up before my mother got up from her nap. I was six years old when I got that beating for "being a leader of the pack".

Veronica Burt

Environmental Services

VISION

In the church I saw a vision of light
Reminding me of the glory of God.
Like an angel's wing so white.
Like the gates of heaven, so tall so bright.
In the face of Christ I see no more war, crime, hunger, sickness or aging.
In the Virgin Mary I see the beginning of a New Kingdom.

Curtis Holley
Environmental Services

ON MY SIXTEENTH BIRTHDAY

On my sixteenth birthday I was very happy. My girlfriends carried me out for dinner. We went to the best McDonald's in town. The burgers smelled like some my dad fixed on the grill. We were having so much fun we almost lost track of time.

I said, "Let's go or I might be punished for being late." So we left. As we got home, I noticed the lights were out. So I thought I could ease in and go to bed. But when I opened the door everyone hollered, SURPRISE!!

Jannette Harris
Dietary Services

JUST SAY NO

Four brothers with nothing to do. Basketball courts chained, arcade room closed. No one to talk to about their problems. Up comes sweet Willie. "Your brother wants you to feel good. Wanna be like me?" As he pulls his money out, I think wow I'd like to have me some money like that. "Come with me and try this." Now the brothers have something to do because now they have just become slaves. Now they just gave up everything that their ancestors fought for: Freedom. Let freedom ring from every project, every church and all over the world. Freedom from the slavery of drugs.

Harold Nichols
Environmental Services